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Sermon Notes

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Born for Friendship

Proverbs

One of my favorite movies of all time: “A Man for All Seasons”... won the Academy Award for Best Film in 1966

It is the story of Sir Thomas More, who was executed for opposing King Henry VIII’s divorce and remarriage, and King Henry’s usurpation of the spiritual authority of the Pope

The film gets its title from Catholic scholar Erasmus’s statement about him in a letter in 1521:

“...it would be hard to find anyone who was more truly a man for all seasons and all men...”

Erasmus and Sir Thomas More were friends, and actually it was another statement by Erasmus that arrested my attention recently:

Erasmus, who knew leaders from around the world, marveled at More’s affable and self-effacing manner. More was, Erasmus wrote, a man “born for friendship,” a person who delighted in conversation with others and who could deal with every type of person at any level.

BORN for friendship... what a phrase

I really believe this is true of every human being, at least in terms of our created purpose

Human beings, created in the image of God, were made to be relational... that is IN RELATIONSHIPS with others!

But not just relationships, but actually FRIENDSHIPS

You can have a relationship with a hairdresser, a postal worker, a check-out clerk you see every week at Kroger’s... but none of these are FRIENDSHIPS; you can have acquaintances at church or at work who ask you about your weekend, notice your new sweater after Christmas, or express sympathy if you’re sick... but again none of these are FRIENDSHIPS

Friendship goes much deeper than any of that

At its core, friendship is a matter of LOVE

C.S. Lewis wrote a book entitled *The Four Loves* and he identified four Greek words for love: storge =affection, philia=friendship, eros=sexual attraction, and agape=charity (unconditional love)

He isolated the fourth, charity (Greek word agape) as the highest, most perfect form of Christian love, because it most perfectly represents God's unconditional love for sinners like us

It has rightly been pointed out that the NT writers tend to use philia and agape interchangeably, though

The difference between unconditional love and friendship is simply this: unconditional love originates in the character of the one who loves and has NOTHING to do with the object; but friendship is DRAWN from the heart by its attributes... we see something in someone and are attracted to that person

We can love a homeless beggar who is reeking of alcohol UNCONDITIONALLY, as God loved us when we were still sinners... that is the God-like spirit of unconditional love; but we wouldn't necessarily be FRIENDS with that person; friendship is BASED on something we see in that person, something that attracts our admiration, our affection, our RELATIONSHIP

I think that, in heaven, we will see FRIENDSHIP perfected... we will see very desirable attributes in others and we will see them forever... similar to the love the Father has for the Son:

Matthew 3:17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Every love in the universe is but a dim reflection of the love the Father has for the Son, and the Son for the Father by the Spirit. The Father, from eternity past, delighted in His Son—in His perfections, His nature, His heart, His attributes...

So it will be in heaven... we will truly delight in other Christians for what they ARE, not unconditionally... we will not love people in heaven in SPITE of what they are, but BECAUSE of what they are

And we will love them ETERNALLY for what they will be in heaven, they will be forever... a perfectly glorious display of Christ

Today, I want to meditate with you on the delights of friendship...

A recent survey showed that people who have invested in deep friendships over a long period of time are likely to be the happiest people on earth

Friendship is of the essence of happiness... without friendships, life itself is lonely and empty

As we meditate on friendships, I want to do so from both an eternal, lofty, God-centered way and a practical, down-to-earth, rubber-meets-the-road way

For the first part, I will look at all of Scripture; for the second, I will zero in on Proverbs

I. The Ultimate Friendship

A. Created for Friendship... with God

1. Thomas More was “born and framed” for friendship
2. So were we... but of the highest kind: friendship with God
3. We were created to delight God and to be delighted in God

B. Abraham Called God’s Friend

1. God’s amazing statement

Isaiah 41:8 "But you, O Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend

2. James’s restatement

James 2:21-23 Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³ And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.

- a. Abraham’s friendship with God consisted very much in his willingness to TRUST God no matter what, and to SACRIFICE whatever God asked of him
- b. So God revealed Himself and His plans to Abraham

Genesis 18:16-17 When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. ¹⁷ Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?"

3. Friendship with God implied in many other cases... especially “walking with God”

Genesis 5:24 Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

Genesis 6:9 This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.

4. Abraham was commanded to walk with God... and he did!!

Genesis 17:1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless.

5. So also God's general command to us

Micah 6:8 He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Summary: we were created for friendship with God, just as Abraham was

C. Jesus Called His Disciples Friends

1. The church began the day Jesus "hung out with" some of John the Baptist's disciples

John 1:35-39 The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶ When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹ "Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour.

This was the amazingly quiet, understated Genesis of the church: some men spending time with Jesus in fellowship and friendship

This quiet little incident is so unremarkable that we are not surprised that Matthew, Mark, and Luke did not mention it... but I think John wrote it down because he was actually one of those first five disciples who spent time with Jesus that day... undoubtedly they ate meals together, they talked together, and they became FRIENDS... thus began the CHURCH, a union of the true friends of Jesus

2. So, the privilege of being Jesus' friends:

John 15:13-15 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

3. After the resurrection:

John 21:5 He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered.

Jesus then guides them to a huge catch of fish, and makes breakfast with them... the sweet consummation of their years together, and a foretaste of heaven!!

D. What Does it Mean to Be Friends with God?

1. Of the essence of friendship with God: daily humble obedience to Him
2. He is God and always will be... infinitely high above us created beings
3. Jesus says we are His friends IF WE OBEY HIS COMMANDS
4. Micah says we should walk HUMBLY with our God
5. Abraham obeyed the bitter command to sacrifice Isaac and was called God's friend... Abraham himself, when interceding for Sodom and Gomorrah called himself "only dust and ashes"
6. God for His part, then cherishes us and reveals Himself to us: His plans, His purposes, His person

E. Transformed from Enemies to Friends

1. The most amazing part of this world is that we, even we sinners, should be called God's friends
2. This is the power of the BLOOD OF Christ... to make ENEMIES into FRIENDS

Colossians 1:21-22 *Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation*

3. This means that we have the power to walk with God in this world as His friends: He likes us, delights in us, and works in us to be better friends to Him

F. Eternal Friendship with God

John 17:3 *Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

1 Corinthians 13:12 *Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.*

Revelation 22:3-4 *No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.*

With the unshakeable foundation of a reconciled VERTICAL friendship with God, we are then led into HORIZONTAL friendships with others

II. The Gospel Makes Friendships

The Gospel is the power of God for salvation from sin... it reconciles us vertically toward God

BUT it is also the power of God for reconciliation HORIZONTALLY with brothers and sisters in Christ... we are brought into a marvelous fellowship with friends we haven't met yet from every nation on earth

A. The Common Word for Brothers in Christ: Friends

Acts 4:23 When [Peter and John] were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

3 John 1:15 Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, every one of them.

Many NT passages use the word "beloved" to address brothers and sisters in Christ... this is a word of friendship... "Dear friends"

B. The Commands to Love One Another

1 John 4:7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

1 Peter 3:8 Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

C. Partners in Worship... Both in this Age and the Age to Come

Psalms 95:6-7 Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; ⁷ for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

Revelation 7:9-10 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

D. Co-Laborers in the Gospel

Romans 16:21 Timothy, my fellow worker, sends his greetings to you

2 Corinthians 8:23 As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you

Philippians 4:2-3 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

E. Disciples and Disciplers

1. Three types of people in your life: a Paul, a Barnabas, a Timothy
2. All three based on discipleship... and all three FOUNDED ON FRIENDSHIP
3. Christ intended that we befriend one another sweetly in the bonds of friendship and help each other make progress in sanctification

F. The Beauty of the Church

John 17:22-23 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: ²³ I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity

John 13:35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

G. Perfect Friendship in Heaven

1. Unconditional love only needed on EARTH
 - a. People disappoint us, and are changeful in their sin
 - b. “Unconditional love” just means “Secure love”... i.e. you won’t be kicked out of the family
 - c. We are called on to love each other “in spite of” each other’s sins
 - d. We are called to bear with one another, and forgive whatever grievances we may have with one another
2. In heaven, however, we will NOT love each other “in spite of” anything
 - a. Our love for each other will be patterned after the Father’s love for the Son
 - b. The Father loves the Son BECAUSE of His perfection, not “in spite of” anything
 - c. The Father DELIGHTS in the Son’s radiance, the Son’s glory, the Son’s heart of righteousness
 - d. SO IT WILL BE WITH OUR HEAVENLY FRIENDSHIPS... we will love one another BECAUSE OF the glory of Christ we will see in each other

- e. It will not be unconditional... it will be on the worth and value and perfection of Christ actually in each glorified person
- f. Like when we see a magnificent vista on the New Earth—some perfect mountain range radiating in green and the glory of God shining in the new universe, our breath will be taken away and we will love it FOR ITS OWN SAKE, because it IS majestic... so it will be with the saints in heaven

3. How many NEW FRIENDS will we have in heaven?

Revelation 7:9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language

III. Practical Instructions on Friendship from Proverbs

A. Beware of False Friendships

- 1. Lots in Proverbs about false motives for friendship
- 2. Especially MONEY

Proverbs 14:20 The poor are shunned even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends.

Proverbs 19:4 Wealth brings many friends, but a poor man's friend deserts him.

- 3. So also lavish gifts

Proverbs 19:6 Many curry favor with a ruler, and everyone is the friend of a man who gives gifts.

- 4. When trouble comes, such false friends abandon him

Proverbs 19:7 A poor man is shunned by all his relatives-- how much more do his friends avoid him! Though he pursues them with pleading, they are nowhere to be found.

- 5. Proverbs also warns about bad people to befriend

a. Criminals

Proverbs 1:10-16 My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them. ¹¹ If they say, "Come along with us; let's lie in wait for someone's blood, let's waylay some harmless soul; ¹² let's swallow them alive, like the grave, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; ¹³ we will get all sorts of valuable things and fill our houses with plunder; ¹⁴ throw in your lot with us, and we will share a common

purse"-- ¹⁵ my son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths; ¹⁶ for their feet rush into sin, they are swift to shed blood.

b. Angry men

Proverbs 22:24-25 Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, ²⁵ or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared.

Proverbs teaches us the danger of false friends who lead us astray:

1 Corinthians 15:33 Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

B. Attributes of a True Friend

1. Selectivity

Proverbs 12:26 A righteous man is cautious in friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

This Proverb is notoriously difficult to translate, but the Hebrew implies that a righteous man carefully investigates his friend... in other words, he searches out his intentions

A good friend is selective also in that he doesn't want a bunch of SHALLOW relationships

Proverbs 18:24 A man of too many friends comes to ruin, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

We'll come back to this one in just a moment

2. Sacrifice

a. It is impossible to be a friend without being willing to sacrifice for that friend

b. In fact, the measure of devotion is how much we'll sacrifice for that friend

Walter Winchell: "A true friend is one who walks in when others walk out."

Lew Wein: "A friend is someone who is there for you when he'd rather be anywhere else."

c. So Proverbs holds up sacrifice during adversity

Proverbs 17:17 A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

A true friend is willing to be there, unlike the friends of the rich or friends of rulers... he's there at ALL TIMES, especially times of adversity

This takes a willingness to sacrifice for the sake of a friend

3. Loyalty

Proverbs 18:24 A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Proverbs 27:10 Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father, and do not go to your brother's house when disaster strikes you-- better a neighbor nearby than a brother far away.

- a. A true friend is loyal, sticking by you and upholding your cause
- b. Jesus' friends all deserted him when he was arrested
- c. But Jesus has made us this promise:

Hebrews 13:5 "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

- d. So also a true friend makes a similar promise to his friend
- e. Perhaps the friend is sick, perhaps, the friend is unpopular after saying something stupid or even some gross sin... a true friend remains loyal
- f. A true friend is someone who knows the deepest parts of you, a likes you anyway!!

4. Forgiveness

- a. In this world, where we still battle the sin nature, every single human relationship is BASED on willingness to forgive, to cover each other's sins

Proverbs 10:12 Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.

Proverbs 17:9 He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.

- b. This covering of sin is true forgiveness... a willingness for the friend to bear the cost of the debt;
- c. AND to not bring it up again in the future

1 Corinthians 13 "Love keeps no record of wrongs"

5. Trustworthiness

Proverbs 16:28 A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.

- a. A true friend is reliable... you can count on that person; they keep their promises
- b. Furthermore, you can entrust your deepest thoughts to that person and they will not gossip against you
- c. A gossip separates close friends because they are unfaithful, not keeping faith in the relationship
- d. If you entrust something to a true friend, he will keep that trust faithfully til the day he dies

6. Honesty

Proverbs 27:6 Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

- a. This verse refers to the willingness true friends have to tell you the truth about yourself
- b. It's easy for us Christians to deceive ourselves and others about the sin in our lives
- c. Sin is a great deceiver

Romans 7:11 For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.

Hebrews 3:13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

- d. We Christians know how to assent GENERALLY to our sinfulness, along with the rest of the seven billion people on earth; where our pride roils up is when we're confronted about SPECIFIC SIN PATTERNS that may be deceiving us
- e. We can have BLIND SPOTS... and we all need true friends that will tell us the truth
- f. CJ Mahaney, in his excellent book called *Humility*, speaks of cultivating accountability relationships in which honesty about spiritual growth is the central goal

Mahaney tells the story about a man with cream cheese on his face, and I won't repeat it in detail here since I've mentioned it before from the pulpit... just by way of review, as CJ was eating breakfast in a restaurant, he noticed a finely dressed man wearing an Armani suit and a Rolex watch who was eating a bagel and appeared nervous as he was poring over some papers... obviously getting ready for a vital meeting... but as he was leaving, CJ noticed the

man had a big blob of cream cheese on his finely groomed mustache—and he was oblivious to it as he was leaving

CJ says “We all have ‘cream cheese’ moments in our lives... and we need godly Christian friends who will risk wounding us to tell us the truth

CJ advocates accountability relationships in which people are willing to probe deeper, ask extra questions, cut through the masks and pride we put up

g. Warning: this must be done carefully!!! Gently!!! Lovingly!!!

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

h. Key elements: GENTLENESS and HUMILITY

Illus. Some time ago a man met with me to discuss an issue he had raised in the life of the church; there was another brother with me as we met; this man began the meeting with the statement, **“It is my purpose to wound you tonight.”**

He had in mind this very proverb: **The wounds of a friend can be trusted**

But what followed was his reading a five-page letter in which he rather sharply attacked me at various levels

I felt no gentleness, no humility, and no love

YES, the wounds of a friend can be trusted, but make sure you really are a FRIEND; and friends LOVE their friends

7. Wise Counsel

Proverbs 27:9 Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel.

- a. How sweet it is to have godly friends who know you and are willing to give you wise counsel
- b. All of us from time to time are almost reduced to paralysis, not knowing what to do about this or that situation
- c. Should I marry this person? Should I change my major? Should I go on the mission trip to Haiti? Should I sell my house? Should I pursue seminary training? Should I change my approach to parenting?
- d. A true friend steps into your world, weighs the matter, prays it over, and gives you WISE COUNSEL, and does it EARNESTLY

- e. The word “earnest” comes from the Hebrew word which is usually translated “soul”... it is counsel coming straight from the SOUL of your friend
- f. A true friend knits his/her soul to yours and gives earnest counsel as though bearing the burden himself

Review:

1. Selectivity

Proverbs 12:26 A righteous man is cautious in friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

2. Sacrifice

Proverbs 17:17 A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

3. Loyalty

Proverbs 18:24 A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

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7. Wise Counsel

Proverbs 27:9 Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel.

II. Applications

A. Are You Friends with God?

- 1. Let's start with the GOSPEL... have you trusted in Christ?
- 2. If so, are you walking in friendship with God moment by moment?

3. Do you feel acutely the RELATIONAL side of your religion?
4. When you sin, does the fact that Jesus was HURT by what you did cause you the most pain?
5. When you arise, does the idea of walking with Jesus throughout the day bring you the greatest anticipation?

B. Do You Have Any Close Friends?

1. Men: generally men avoid close relationships... we keep our distance, talk about sports, hang out without revealing ourselves
 - a. Do you have anyone who is a trusted friend, who can give you godly advice, who will make sacrifices for you
 - b. Men tend to avoid these as though we don't need them
2. Women: the friendships you have, are they BASED ON THE GOSPEL? Are you seeking to put Christ at the center of those times together?

C. Make it a Goal to Develop Friendships

1. FBC: church-wide, we need to measure our effectiveness in FELLOWSHIP by the quality of the FRIENDSHIPS the gospel is producing here
2. Are we a superficial, surfacy, entertainment, fun, and food church which keeps people at an arm's length?
3. Or does the ministry of this church produce DEEP-SEATED, SPIRITUAL friendships such as those Jesus had with His disciples?
4. In humility, knowing the deceitfulness of sin, seek to develop ACCOUNTABILITY relationships which can help you make genuine progress in your life

D. Seek to Be a Friend

1. Make it a matter of prayer to become the kind of person with whom God can entrust a friend
2. Go back to the Book of Proverbs with prayer and ask God to develop loyalty, and sacrifice, and earnest counsel, and loving honesty in you
3. Seek out a person at FBC and begin a close friendship for the sake of discipleship